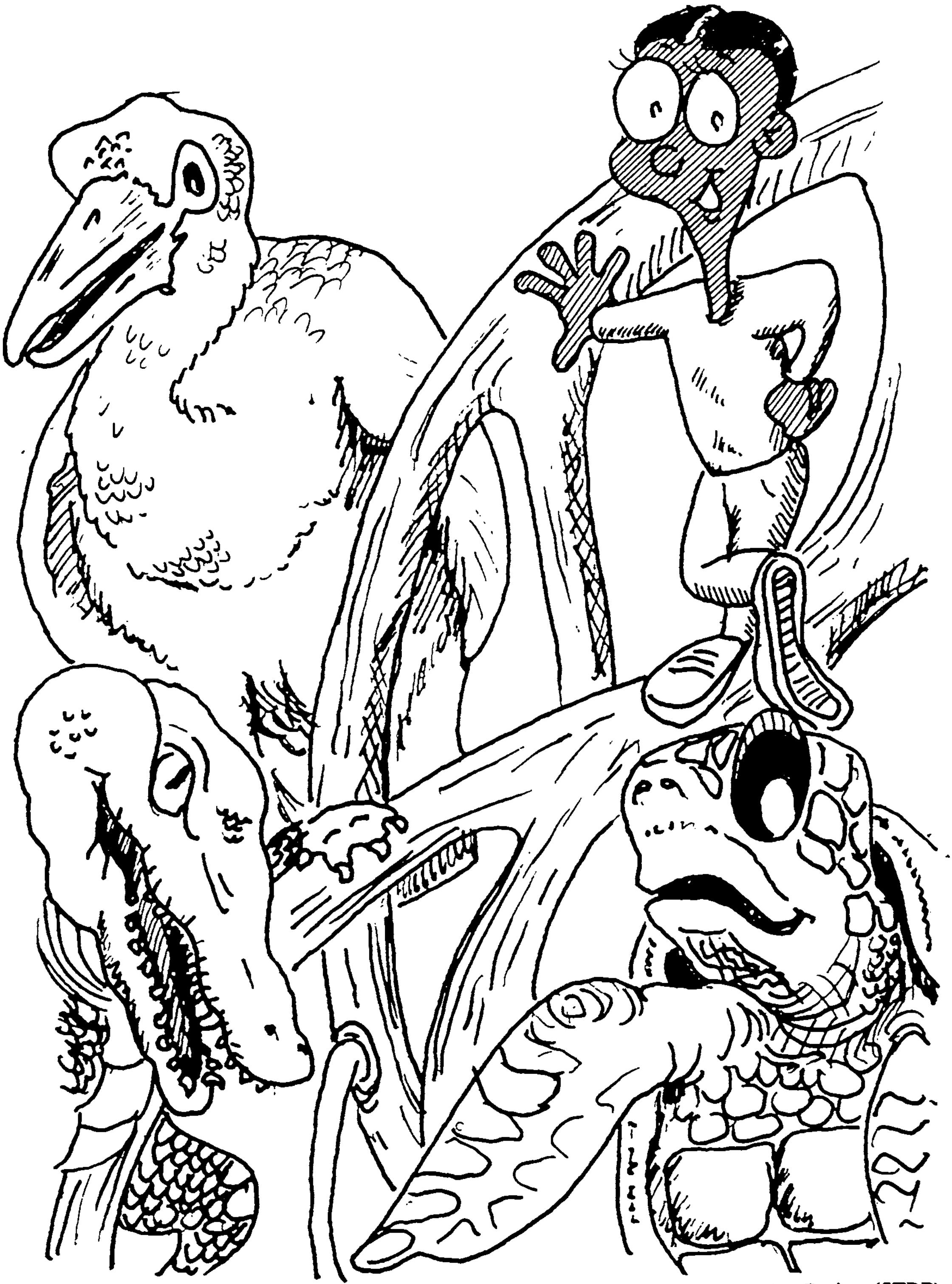
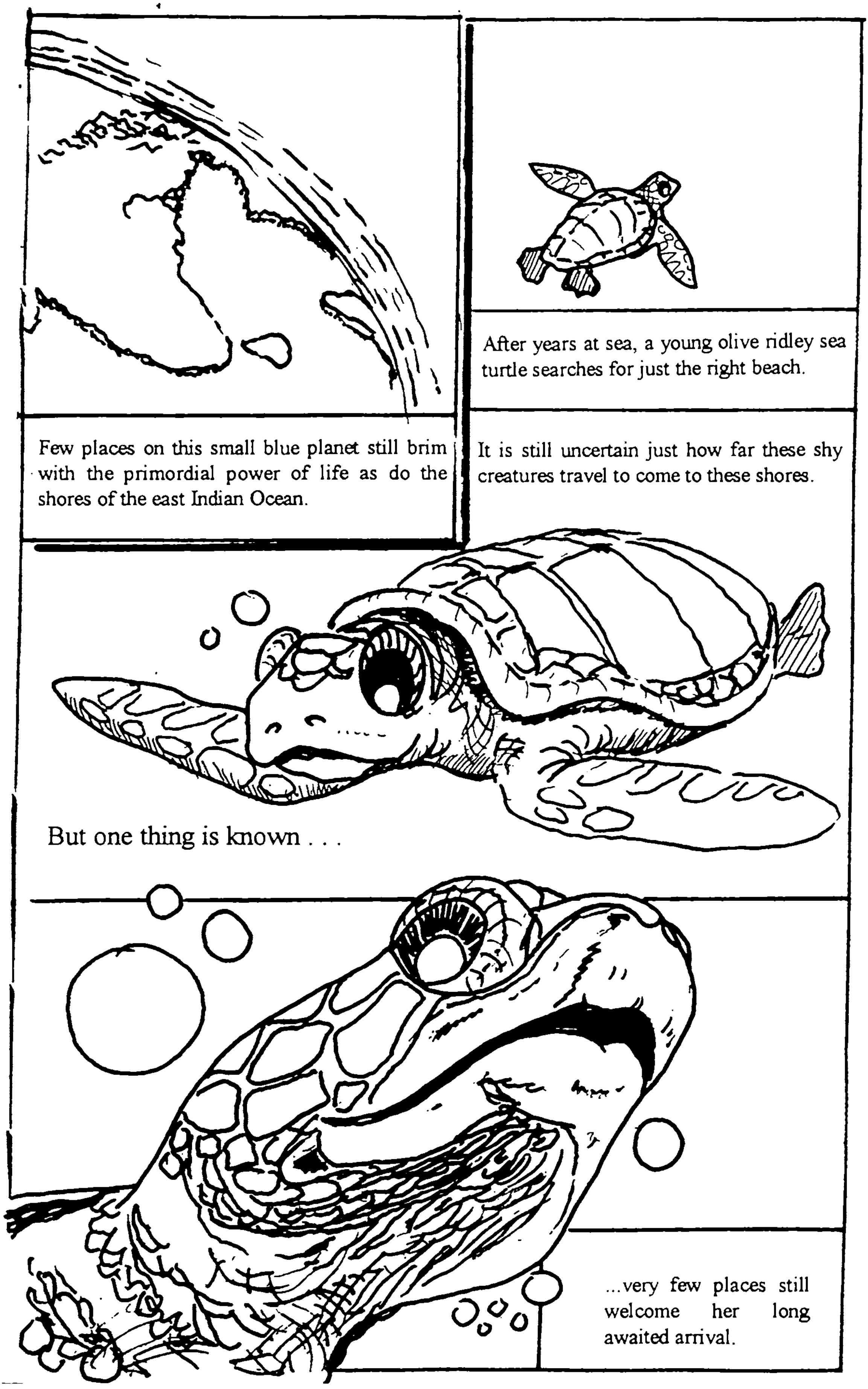
THE REAL STORY OF

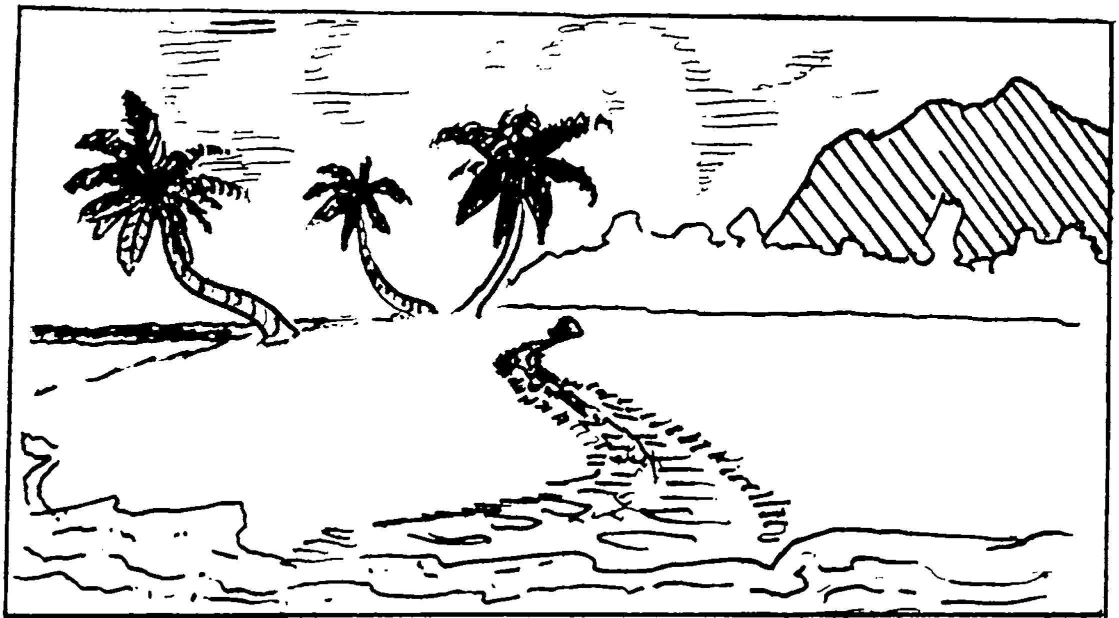
BHITAR KANIKA



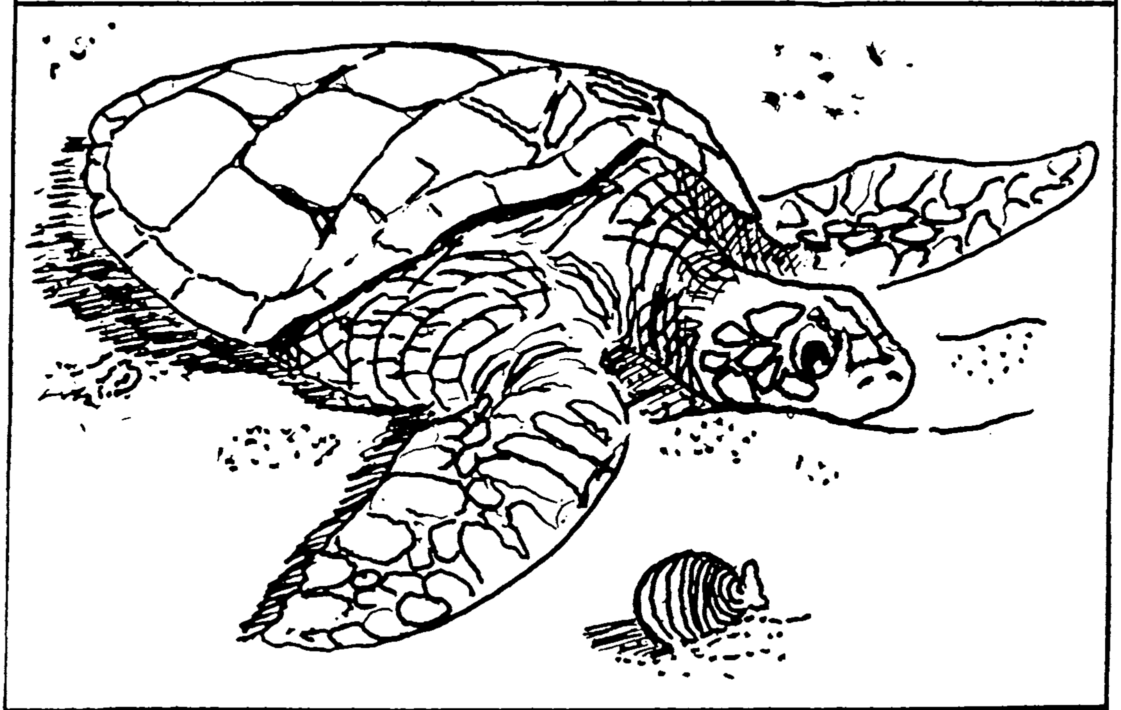
Brought to you by The Mangrove Action Project (MAP) & The Sea Turtle Restoration Project (STRP)



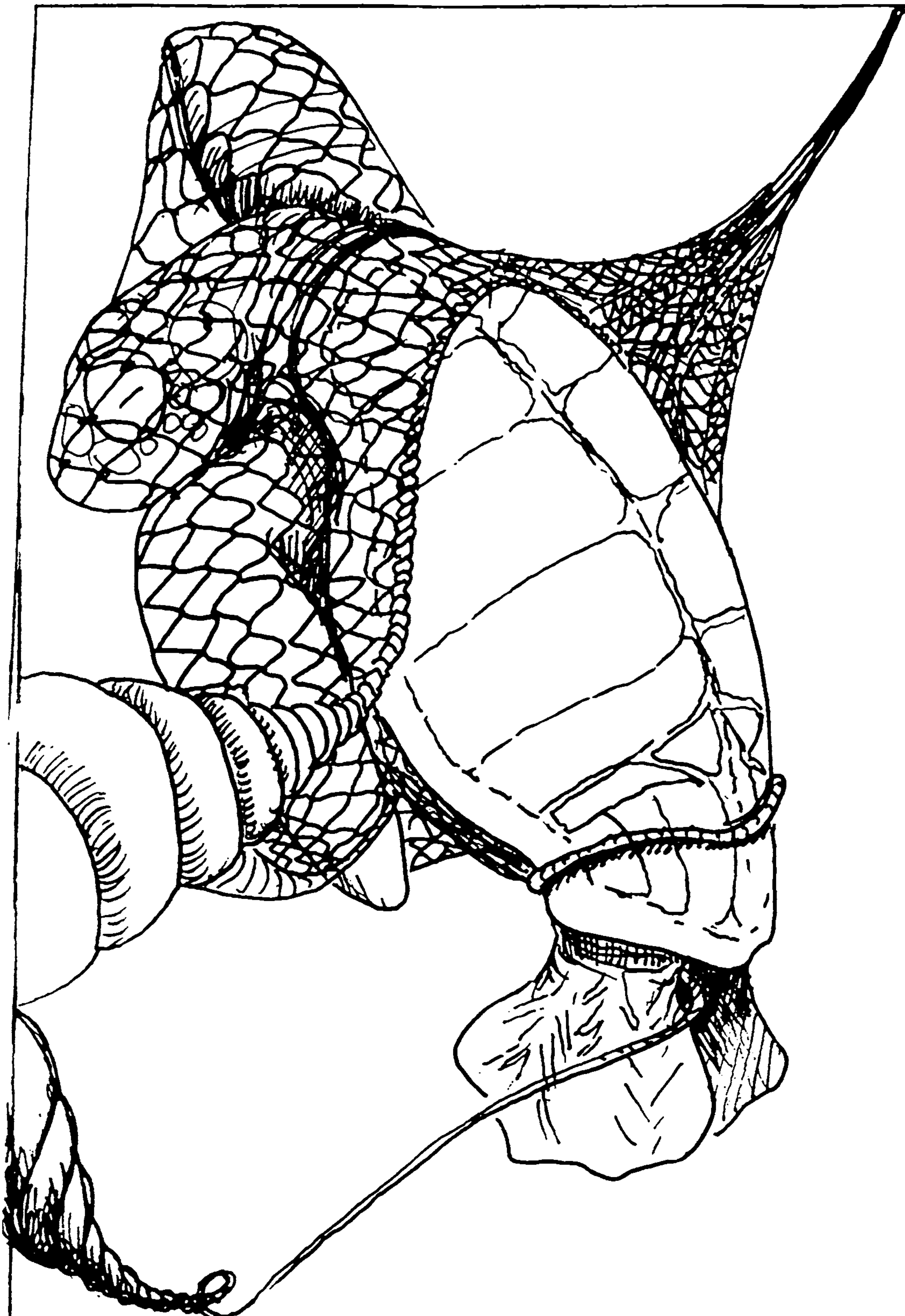
After years at sea, a young olive ridley sea turtle searches for just the right beach.
Few places on this small blue planet still brim with the primordial power of life as do the shores of the east Indian Ocean.
It is still uncertain just how far these shy creatures travel to come to these shores.
But one thing is known . . .
...very few places still welcome her long awaited arrival.



It is not that these wonderful creatures are a threat to the calm and serene beaches they visit. Rather, it is that the beaches have become a threat to them. Overdevelopment of the olive ridley sea turtles' breeding grounds has destroyed all but a few secluded places on Earth.

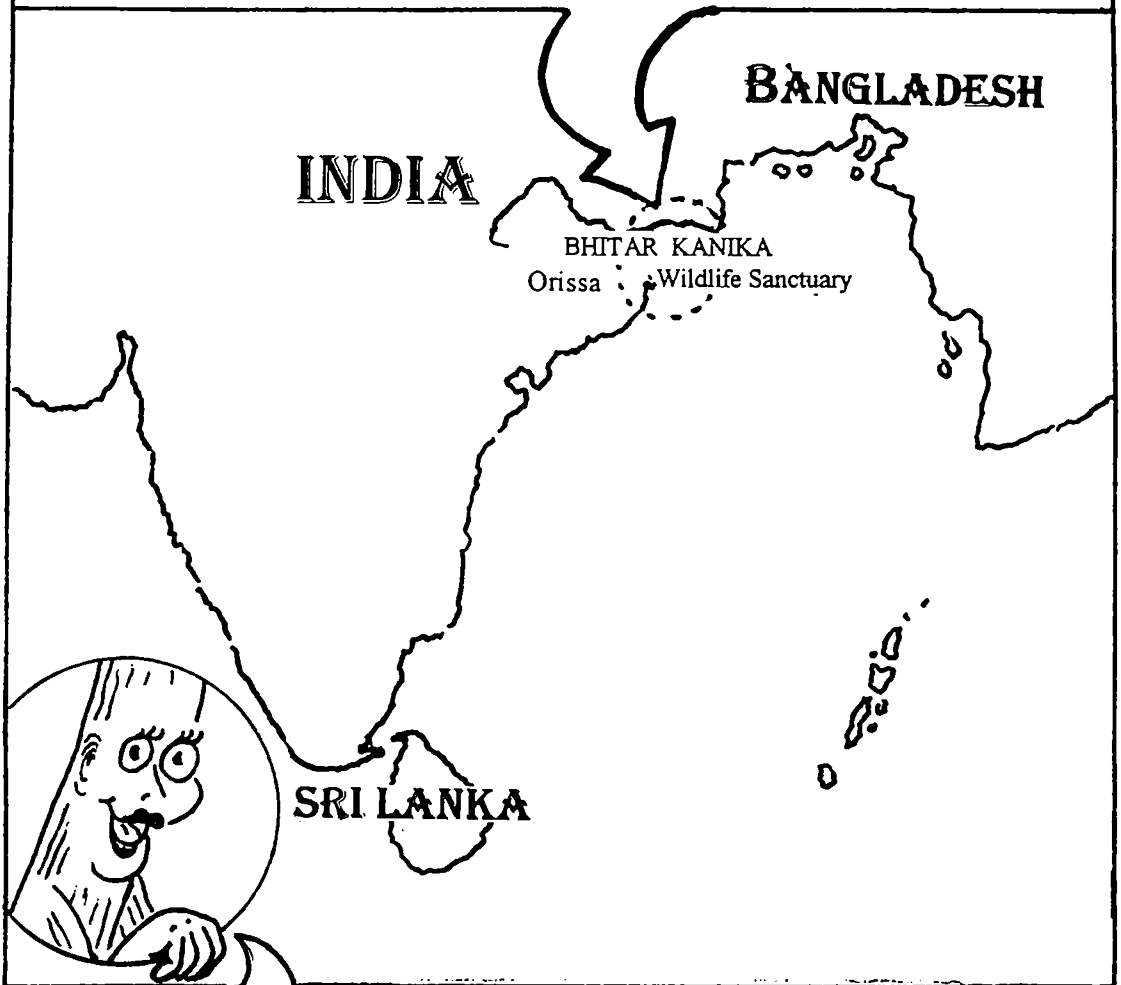


The olive ridley sea turtles are among the most vunerable of all the endangered sea turtle species. Since the early 50's their populations have declined drastically. Each spring, female turtles lay approximately 100 eggs. If they hatch, very few will survive the waiting predators as they struggle to reach the waters of the beach. Following the light of the moon, these tiny hatchlings must scurry across wide stretches of sand to reach the water. Swooping birds dive bomb the helpless turtles, killing more than half before they slip into the sea, only to risk predation of other, larger fish, birds and sea mammals. However, once the turtle reaches adult sizes it has very few natural predators. Only one animal threatens their peaceful and gentle existence . . .



...HUMANS

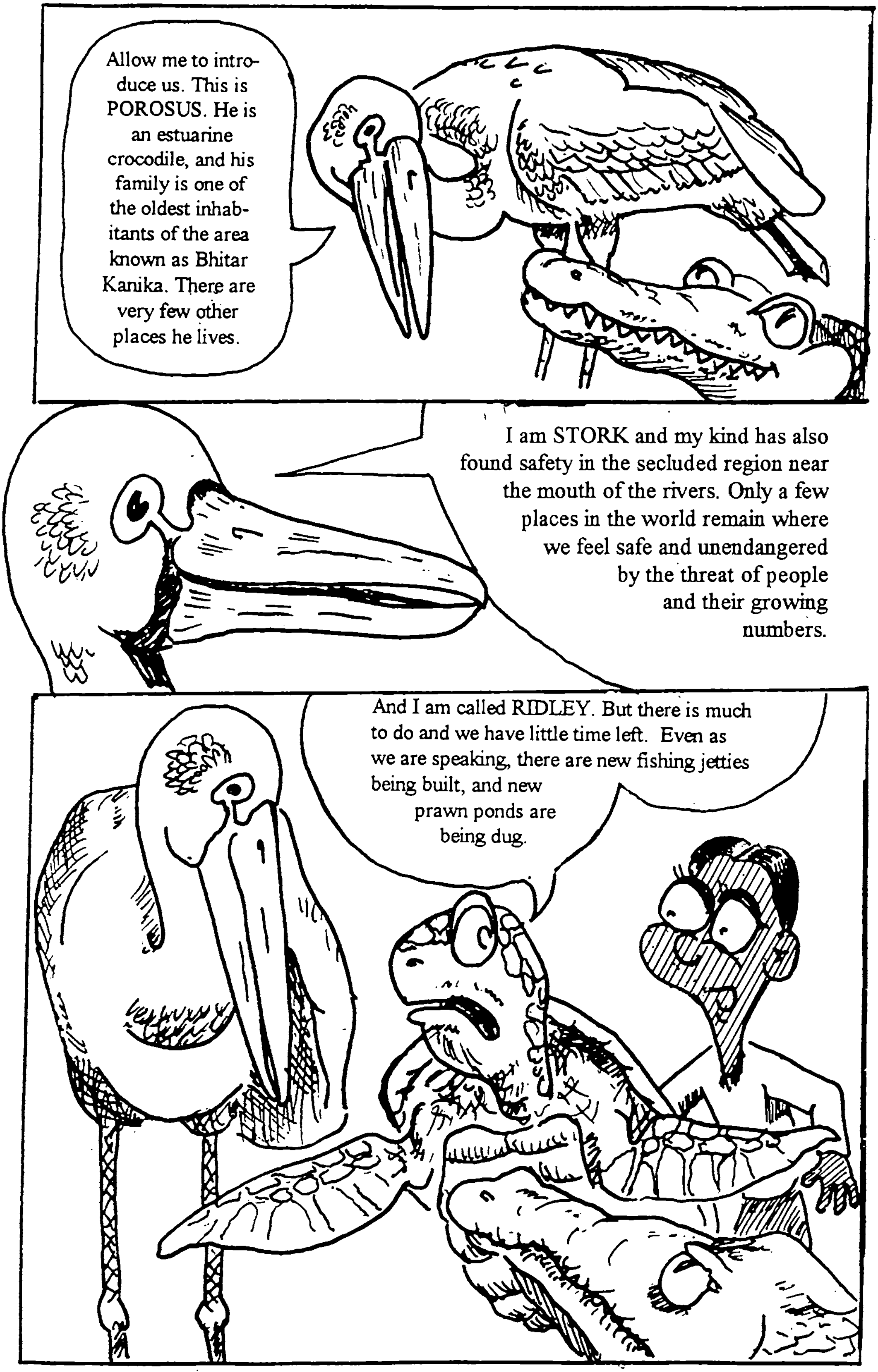
Bhitar Kanika, on the Eastern coast of India, was declared a wildlife sanctuary at the initiative of Indira Gandhi and the Government of Orissa in 1975 and covers more than 650 square kilomenters of jungle delta. Although its 35 kilometers of beaches are designated as a safe haven for wildlife, including the olive ridley turtles, recent development around the area threatens to destroy access to the very beaches which have been set aside. Fishing jetties are being built just outside the reserve's boundaries to support more than 500 mechanized fishing vessels, many capable of pulling long nets along the bottom, destroying all life within their path. Also, the growth of shrimp aquaculture has sprung up illegally within the reserve, and has begun to encroach upon the region's mangrove forests. These intrusive developments combine to pose a serious threat to both the water quality and wildlife within the sanctuary.

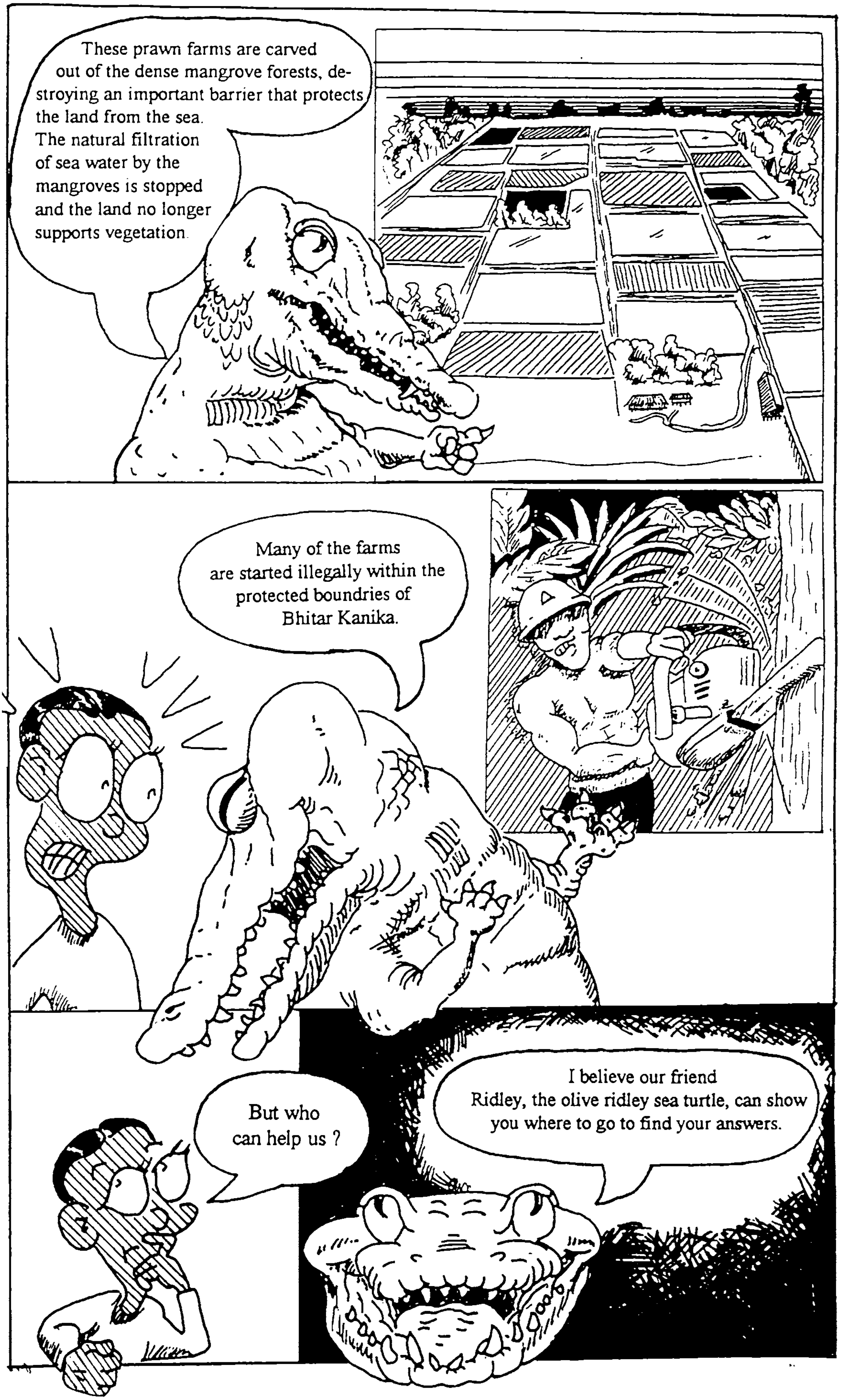


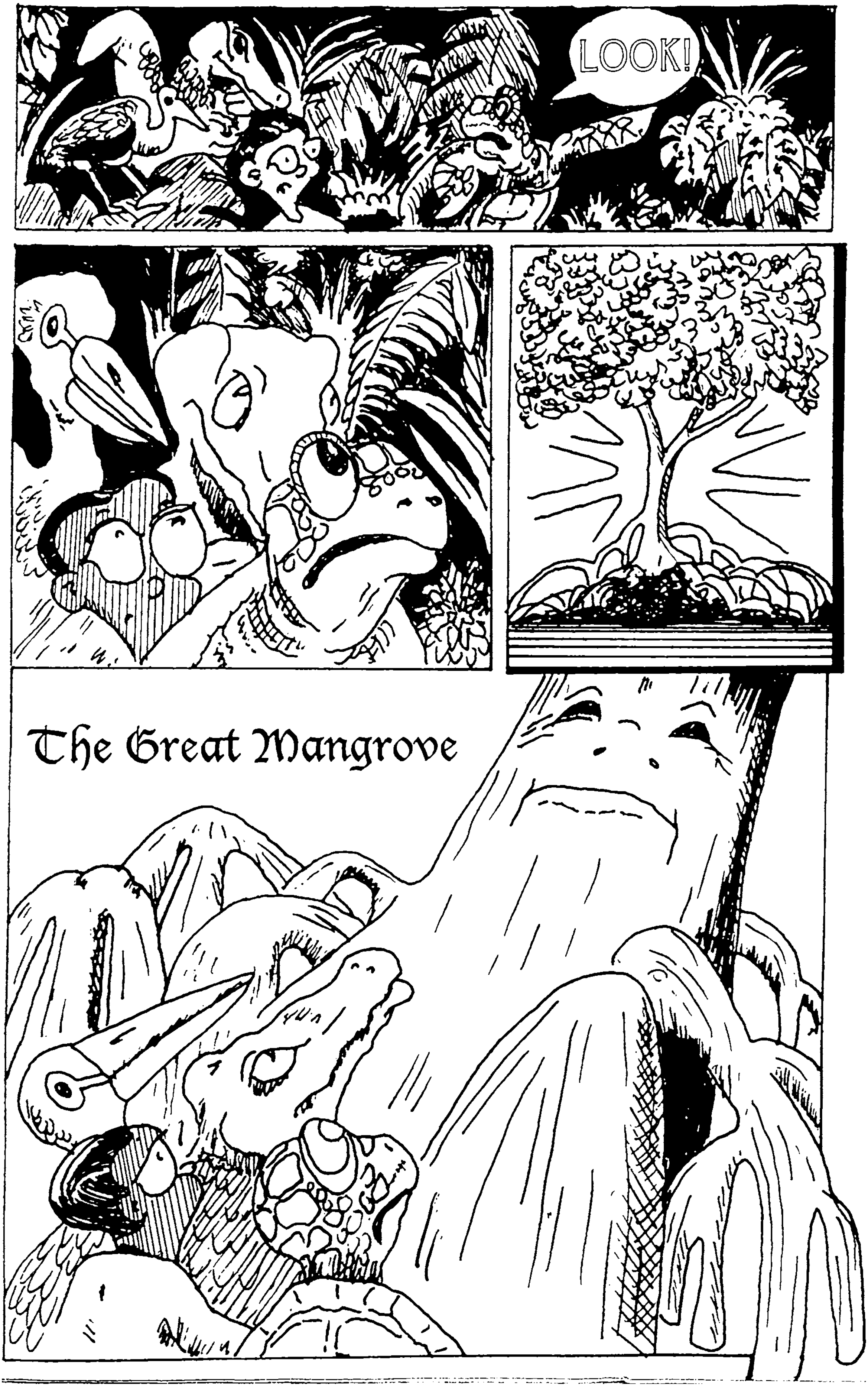
This map designates the location of India's Bhitar Kanika Wildlife Sanctuary. This is a sacred place. A place where more sea turtles nest than any other place on the planet. White breasted sea eagles soar overhead and the shoreline is filled with openbill and painted storks, and dozens of species of herons and egrets. There are six species of kingfishers and the largest population of bareheaded geese in Asia. All told, 80,000 wading birds nest in the reserve. Pythons and king cobras also live here as do the endangered salt water crocodiles, crocodilus porosus, the world's largest crocodile. It is a place few people have visited, and it is perhaps better that way.

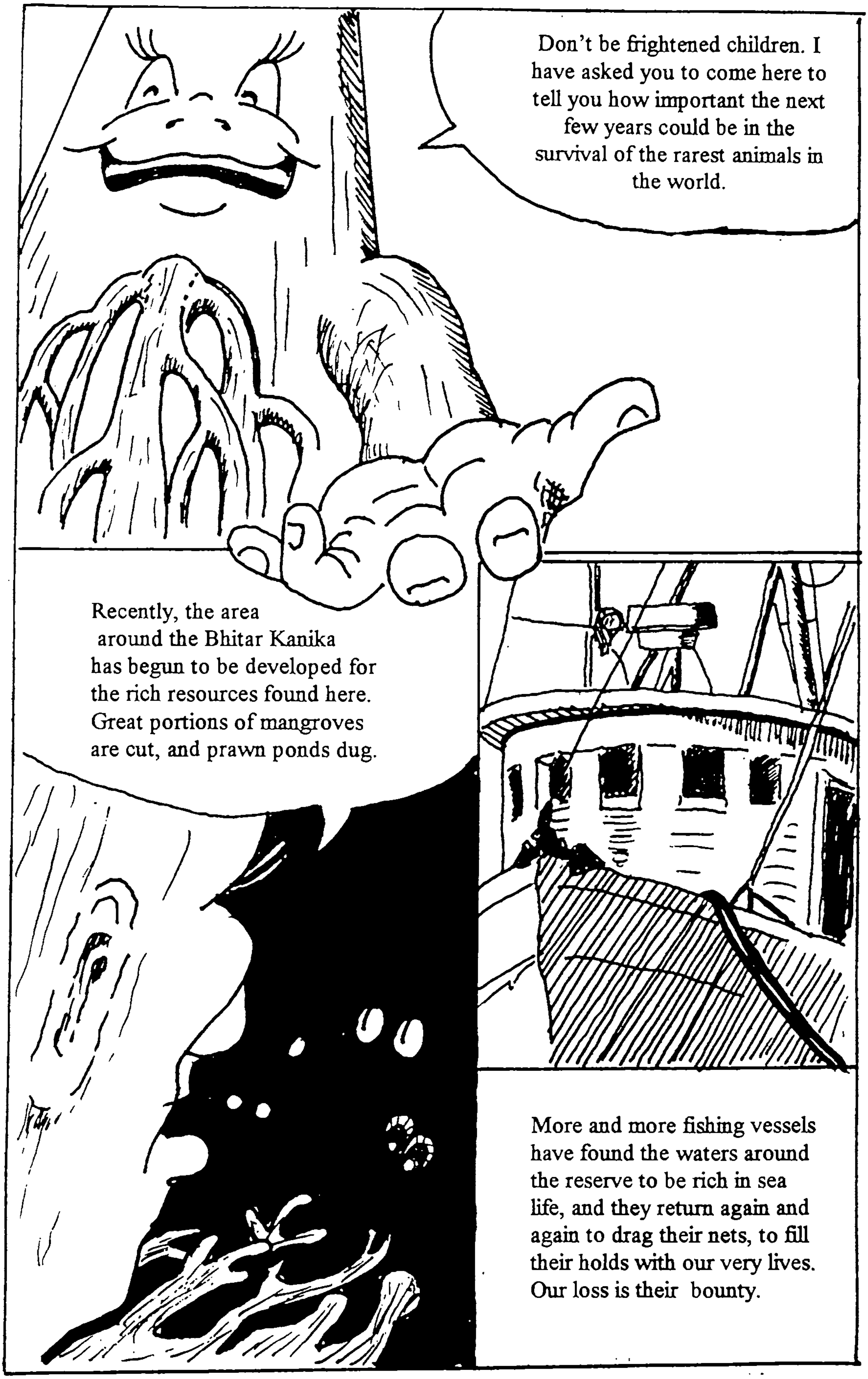

BHITAR KANIKA
Well, that seems silly! If Bhitar Kanika is a sanctuary, then the water around the sanctuary should be protected as well.
How can the turtles get to the beach if they have to swim through the nets? After all, are we protecting the beaches or the turtles?
Oh well, its time for bed. I just hope I don't have bad dreams.

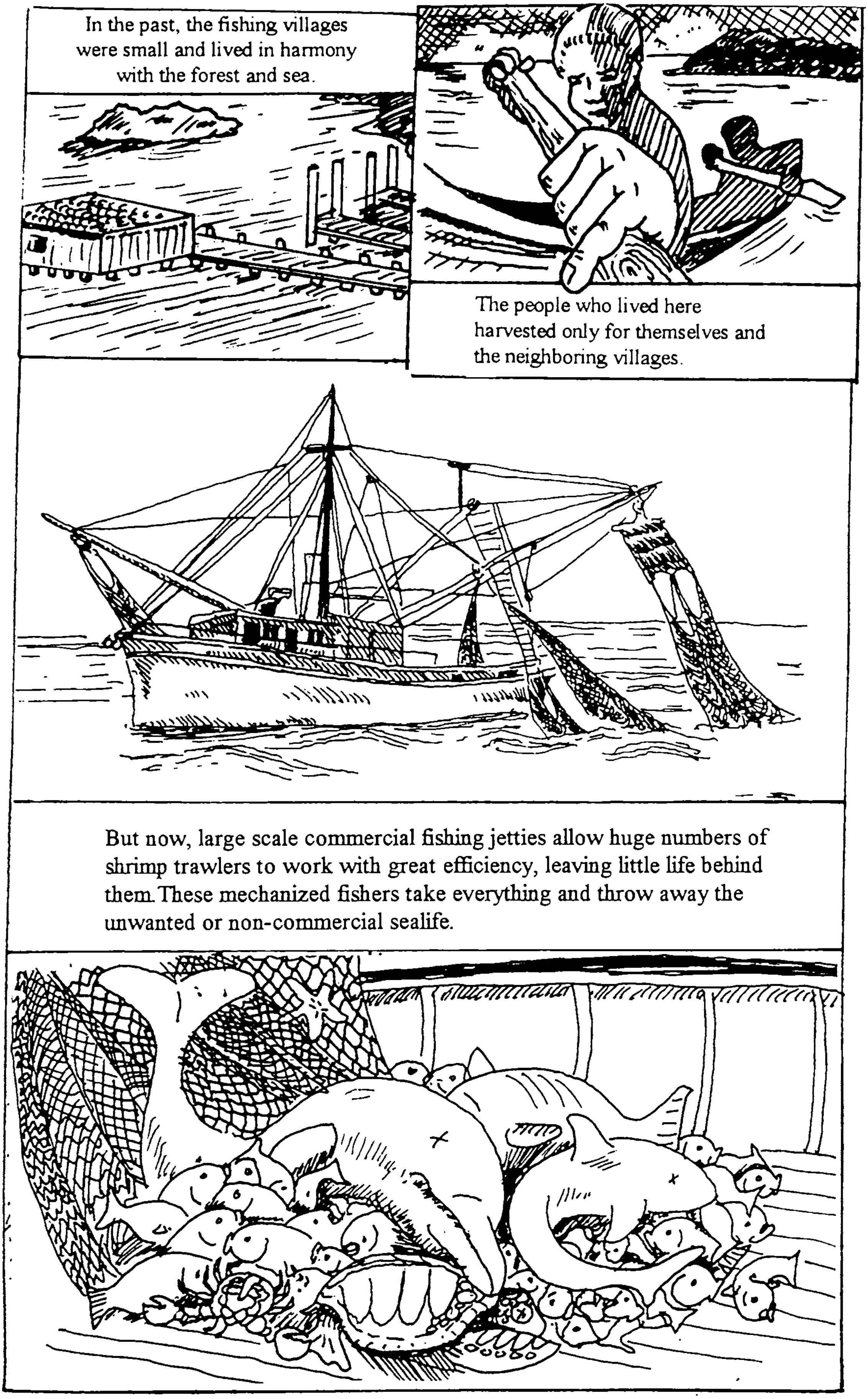

HEY ! Who are you?
We were hoping that you'd remem-ber us from earlier.
We are from Bhitar Kanika. We've come here to find you and to ask you something. . .
The animals from the area have asked that the three of us represent them and seek your help to save our homes.
Yes, please come with us now, away from the safety and security of your fine home and see how *OUR* home is being invaded. We have no place left to flee. If our home is destroyed, we shall be destroyed with it ... forever!

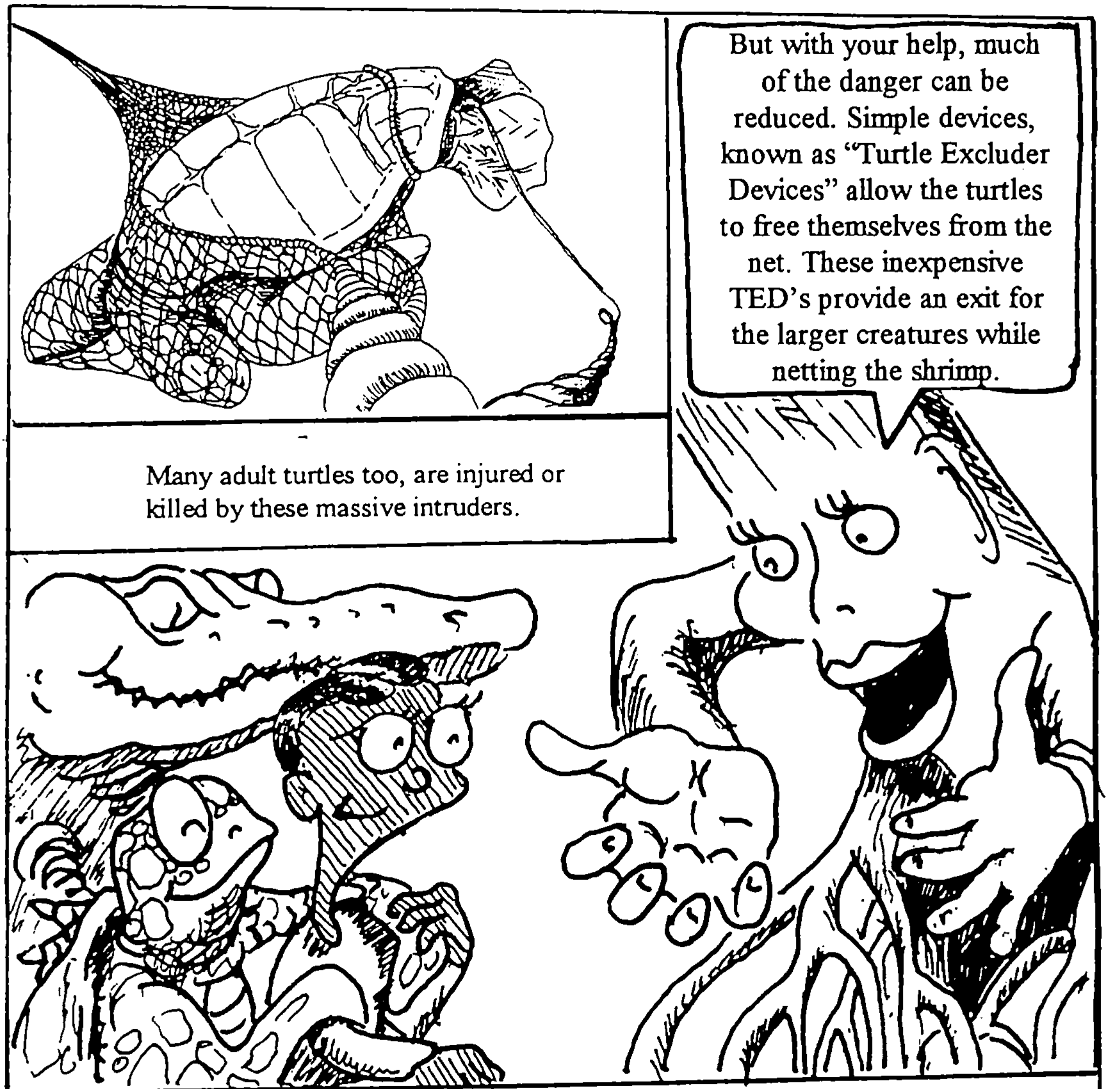

Allow me to introduce us. This is POROSUS. He is an estuarine crocodile, and his family is one of the oldest inhabitants of the area known as Bhitar Kanika. There are very few other places he lives.
I am STORK and my kind has also found safety in the secluded region near the mouth of the rivers. Only a few places in the world remain where we feel safe and unendangered by the threat of people and their growing numbers.
And I am called RIDLEY. But there is much to do and we have little time left. Even as we are speaking, there are new fishing jetties being built, and new prawn ponds are being dug.

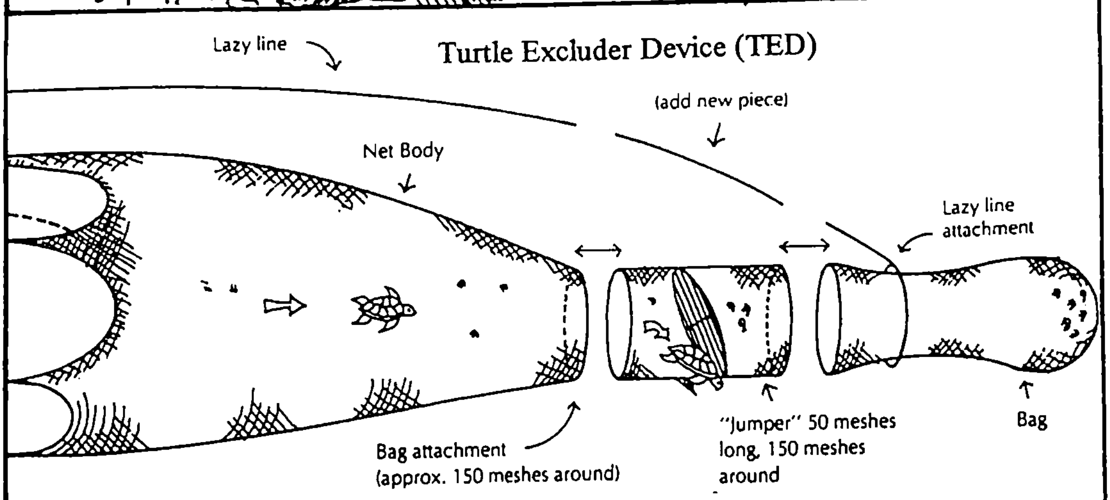

These prawn farms are carved out of the dense mangrove forests, destroying an important barrier that protects the land from the sea. The natural filtration of sea water by the mangroves is stopped and the land no longer supports vegetation.
Many of the farms are started illegally within the protected boundries of Bhitar Kanika.
But who can help us ?
I believe our friend Ridley, the olive ridley sea turtle, can show you where to go to find your answers.


LOOK!
The Great Mangrove

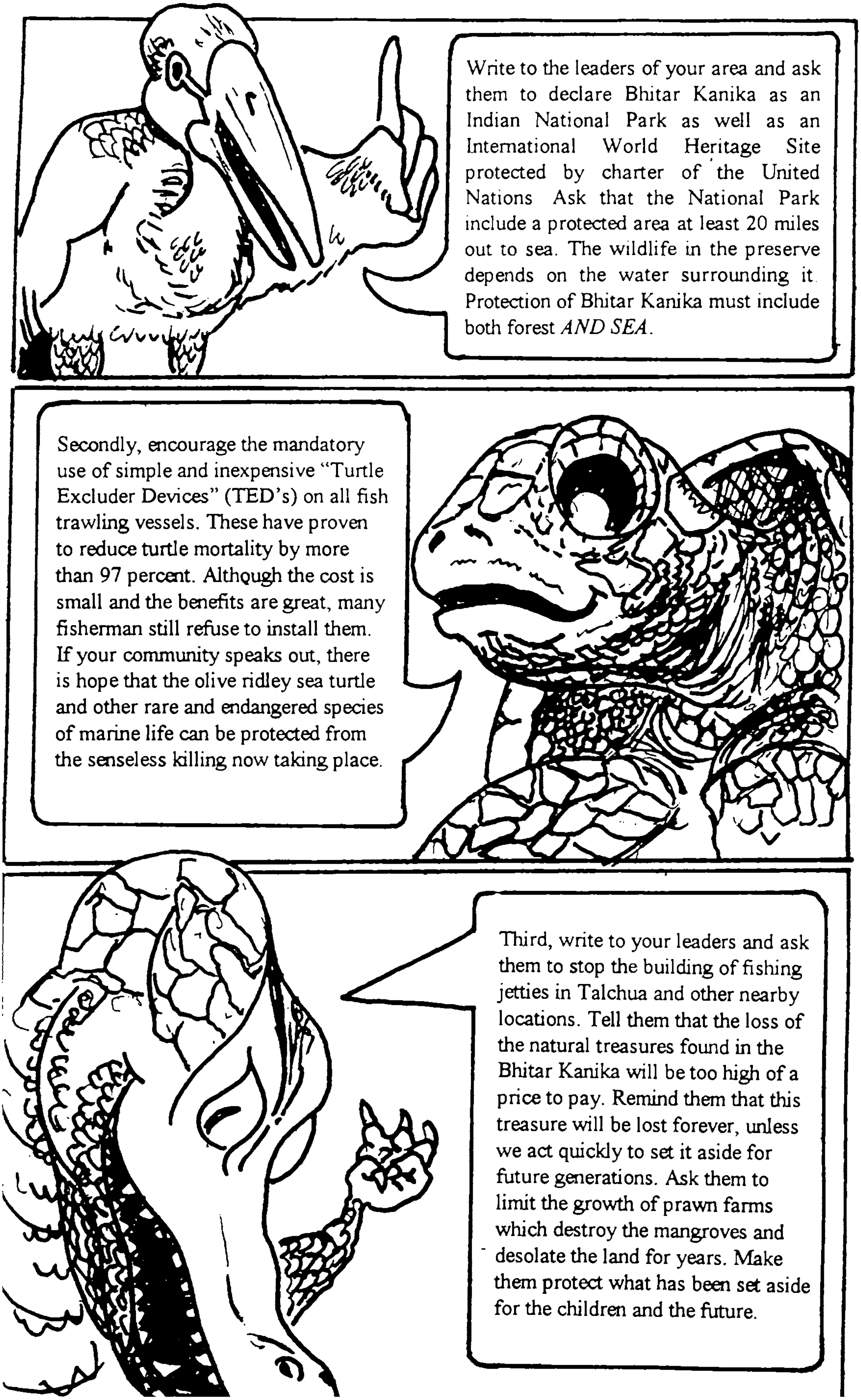

Don't be frightened children. I have asked you to come here to tell you how important the next few years could be in the survival of the rarest animals in the world.
Recently, the area around the Bhitar Kanika has begun to be developed for the rich resources found here. Great portions of mangroves are cut, and prawn ponds dug.
More and more fishing vessels have found the waters around the reserve to be rich in sea life, and they return again and again to drag their nets, to fill their holds with our very lives. Our loss is their bounty.

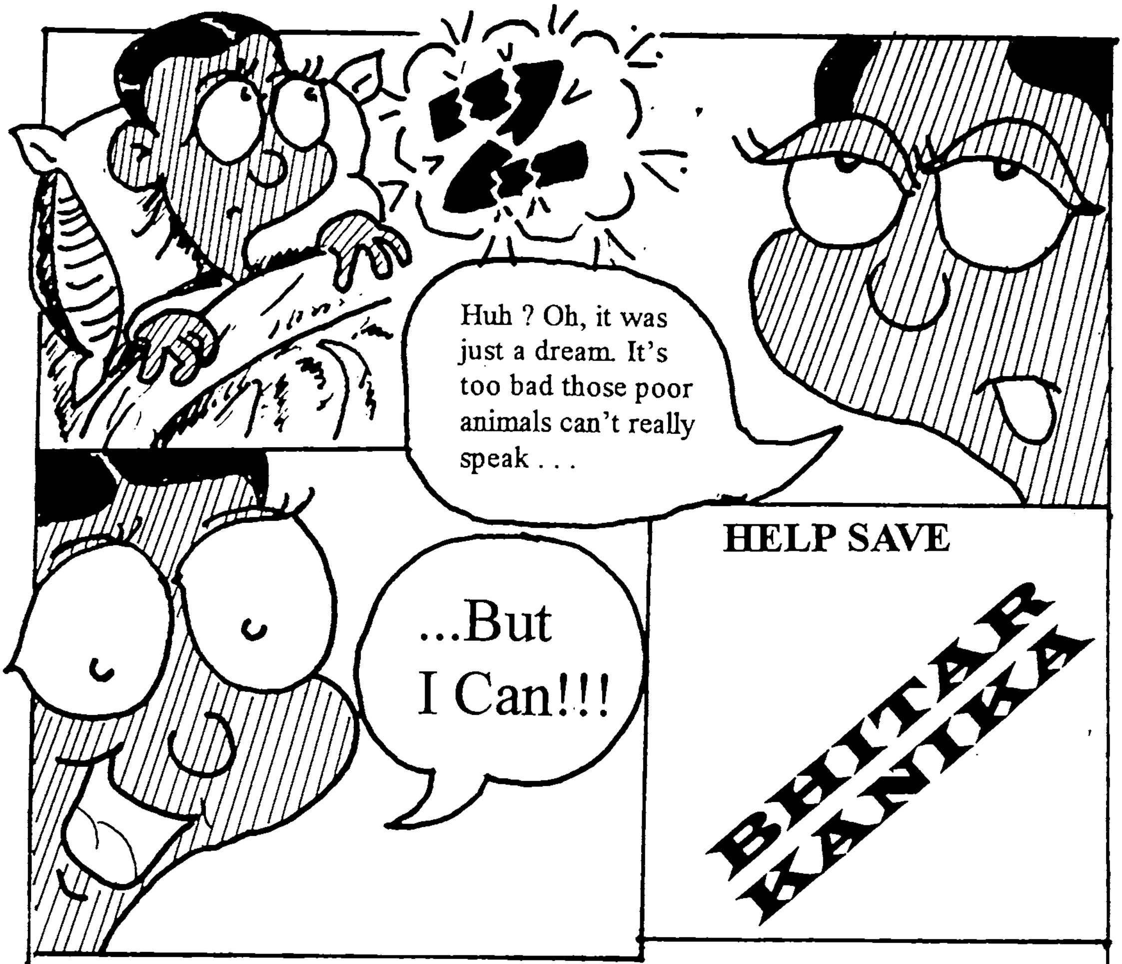

In the past, the fishing villages were small and lived in harmony with the forest and sea.
The people who lived here harvested only for themselves and the neighboring villages.
But now, large scale commercial fishing jetties allow huge numbers of shrimp trawlers to work with great efficiency, leaving little life behind them. These mechanized fishers take everything and throw away the unwanted or non-commercial sealife.





This Turtle Excluder Device illustration is courtesy of Sinkey Boone


Write to the leaders of your area and ask them to declare Bhitar Kanika as an Indian National Park as well as an International World Heritage Site protected by charter of the United Nations Ask that the National Park include a protected area at least 20 miles out to sea. The wildlife in the preserve depends on the water surrounding it. Protection of Bhitar Kanika must include both forest *AND SEA*.
Secondly, encourage the mandatory use of simple and inexpensive "Turtle Excluder Devices" (TED's) on all fish trawling vessels. These have proven to reduce turtle mortality by more than 97 percent. Although the cost is small and the benefits are great, many fisherman still refuse to install them. If your community speaks out, there is hope that the olive ridley sea turtle and other rare and endangered species of marine life can be protected from the senseless killing now taking place.
Third, write to your leaders and ask them to stop the building of fishing jetties in Talchua and other nearby locations. Tell them that the loss of the natural treasures found in the Bhitar Kanika will be too high of a price to pay. Remind them that this treasure will be lost forever, unless we act quickly to set it aside for future generations. Ask them to limit the growth of prawn farms which destroy the mangroves and desolate the land for years. Make them protect what has been set aside for the children and the future.



The fishing trawlers kill not only the turtles such as the olive ridley, but destroy many other species as well. For every pound of shrimp caught by the trawlers, *TEN POUNDS* of fish are destroyed, wasted as byproduct. Furthermore, these shrimp (and the shrimp from the prawn farms) are mostly exported to developed nations like Japan and the U.S. and little remains in the local market. The time has come for us to speak out against the wastefulness of the prawn and fishing industries, and to demand that they act responsibly. Your letters and donations will go a long way toward the reclaiming of our planet's abundant natural resources.

MANGROVE ACTION PROJECT — MAP

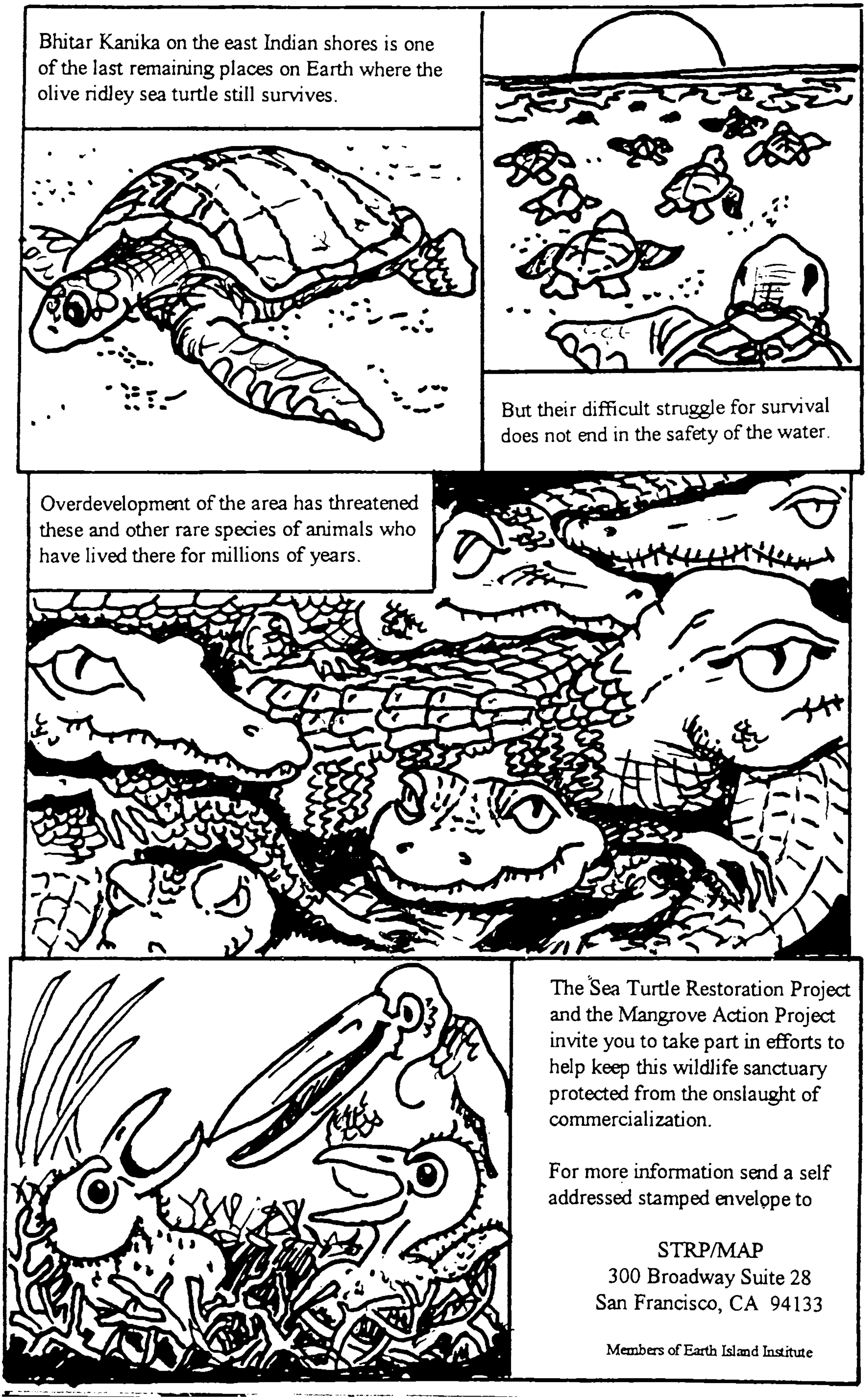
☐ YES I would like to be a part of the solution.
Please find my tax deductible donation of $_______

STRP/MAP
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San Francisco, CA 94133

SEA TURTLE RESTORATION PROJECT

This publication has been produced by Mangrove Action Project, working to preserve the mangrove forests around the globe and by The Sea Turtle Restoration Project working to find solutions that protect endangered turtles. Both are non-profit working projects of Earth Island Institute. Also, thanks must be given to Orissa Krushak Mahasangh of Orissa, India, for their help in editing and distributing this comic.

Written and Illustrated by Puffin Graphics (one guy, one desk) Port Angeles, Wa, 98362


Bhitar Kanika on the east Indian shores is one of the last remaining places on Earth where the olive ridley sea turtle still survives.
But their difficult struggle for survival does not end in the safety of the water.
Overdevelopment of the area has threatened these and other rare species of animals who have lived there for millions of years.
The Sea Turtle Restoration Project and the Mangrove Action Project invite you to take part in efforts to help keep this wildlife sanctuary protected from the onslaught of commercialization.
For more information send a self addressed stamped envelope to
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300 Broadway Suite 28
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